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REMINISCENCES OF A TRAGEDY IN PIONEER LIFE.

F. M. WOOLARD

Sometimes sidelights make their appearance, at a later period, which add interest to incidents or tragedies which were already well known. This is especially true with reference to the murder, by Kickapoo Indians of young Boultinghouse, whose tragic death has been chronicled by all who have attempted to give an accurate account of the exposed condition of the early American settlers in Illinois territory, previous to and during the war of 1812. The incident was supposed to have ended at the close of that stirring period, by the treaty of peace with Great Britain; but this was far from true.

The laws of the United States were strenuous and made no allowance for the vengeance of whites whose families had suffered by the treachery of savages during the war. Hence, the incident which we now record was not generally known until after the death of gallant old Captain Joe Boultinghouse, when his associates in the tragedy of the Little Wabash, regarding all danger from exposure as passed, removed the common suspicion by revealing the facts in the case without extra coloring.

The matters here recorded, however, were well known to the families of the participants, as well as by a few reliable friends, who could be depended upon to hold sacred the trust. Of course many second-hand and even more remote accounts were afloat, often differing in minor details, but which generally agreed as to the main facts; while the better informed witnesses substantially concurred in the account here given.

Twenty-five years ago there were still living in Wayne, Edwards and White counties a number of the sons of pioneers and also native born sons, all well advanced in years at that time, who had known and conversed with one or more of the four participants and sole survivors of the transaction. From some of them I learned the facts here recorded, and have every reason to regard these statements as reliable. I talked with sons of some of the chief actors, and others who had reliable information from first and second hands, and in almost every instance their statements substantially agreed.

From the late President King, who had spent his life near the scene of the tragedy, a son of one of four men engaged in the transaction, I learned his father's oft repeated account. From a grandson of Captain Boultinghouse, then an old man, though scarcely remembering his grandfather, I had a substantial confirmation of Mr. King's statement. From 'Squire Miles Harris, a nephew of Isaac and Gilham Harris, I received a material endorsement of Mr. King's account. 'Squire Harris was a native of Wayne county, where he spent more than four score years. He was a bright man, and while he did not remember the details as revealed from first hands, he had a distinct recollection of the accepted account. He also distinctly remembered the "stray filly."

Judge Samuel J. R. Wilson, who, when a lad came to Wayne county, soon after the occurrence now under discussion, and later became acquainted with all four of the men connected with the affair, had frequent conversations with some of them concerning the matter. He also gave a statement substantially confirming the account here given. I asked him why the real facts had so long been suppressed, and, shrugging his shoulders, he quickly answered: "They were afraid it might get Joe Boultinghouse into trouble with the government." This was correct. I have made this digression in order to introduce the witnesses to the account here given.

Young Boultinghouse was killed in the western part of Edwards county in 1814, and the account was balanced in the eastern part of Wayne county in 1818. The scenes of the provocation and final settlement were not far apart.

That the body of the unfortunate lad had been terribly mutilated by the savages was well known, but the incidents connected therewith so fully calculated to arouse the resentment of those most deeply interested were not revealed until three years later, when quick vengeance was instantly meted out to the heartless degenerates who had not been content with murdering and savagely mutilating the body of the helpless boy, but boasted of their cruel deed with intemperate glee, even imitating his actions, mimicking his cry and ridiculing his piteous pleading for mercy and life. It has been said: "There are things which we can not stand," and under the circumstances who can blame the bereft father, under the most trying ordeal for acting upon a natural impulse? Had he done otherwise he could not today retain the highest esteem in which his memory is held, at home and abroad, by fair minded and just men, who have become familiar with the treacherous methods of those with whom our peaceably disposed ancestors had to constantly reckon.

Captain Boultinghouse was one of nature's strong men, held in high esteem by all who knew him, was quiet, but a born leader, and when deeds of daring were required, all eyes were turned to him as the one best qualified to take the advance. During the days of trouble with the Indians when the enemy were not thought to be in the vicinity, the lad had gone from the fort to the home near the "old Indian village," east of the Little Wabash river, near the county line between Wayne and Edwards counties, to look after a flock of hogs which had been left to range in the woods.

He rode a young filly and while naturally watchful and careful, was ambushed by the savages, and fell from his horse badly wounded. It was not known by his

friends until the incident which we now relate, that he was not killed outright. When he failed to return to the fort, and later, when the large family dog, "Beve," which accompanied him, returned alone, the fact was realized that something had gone wrong with him. Men from the block house went with the father, and when they came to where his body had been left by his murderers a sight of almost indescribable savage brutality was presented to the sorrowing company. The Indians had taken his horse and also from the stable a stock bell, such as were worn by horses when on the range. The father said but little, for like many pioneers and hunters, he was a silent man; but his frame shook, his set lips quivered under the manifest anguish which he suffered.

RETRIBUTION.

Captain Boultinghouse continued at the head of his company of rangers to devote himself to the war until its close, after which he turned his attention to his farm, and hunting wild game, the excitement of which seemed best to bring respite from his sorrows. In the autumn of 1818 in company with Isaac Harris, Gilham Harris, Dave Boultinghouse, a brother, and ——— King, former rangers with him, were hunting bear and deer in Little Wabash bottom, where large game abounded. Presently their attention was attracted by the sound of a horse bell, not far away, and at first they paid little attention to it, but after a little while it was observed that Boultinghouse was in a deep study, being absorbed by close attention for some reason. Finally he said: "There is something peculiar in the tone of that bell, for it has a strange effect on me which I do not understand. Let us go and see what it means." They soon came in sight of the animal wearing the bell, when the captain recognized the beast as the filly, which his son was riding when killed, and also the bell as his own by its appearance and peculiar tone. Walking a short distance to the bank of the river, they came upon a camp

of Indian hunters, which was not an uncommon thing in that region, even as late as 1825, as game was still plentiful there. The Indians had just come in from the day's hunt and had all stacked their guns against a large tree near the camp. There were four Indian men and three squaws. It is far from probable that either Boultinghouse or any member of his party approached the camp with any evil intentions whatever, for as brave and chivalrous a man as he had ever shown himself to be he could not stoop so low as to wish to punish an innocent person for the acts of guilty men.

The conversation following was in broken English and a kind of recognizable sign language. At first the chief spokesman of the Indian party appeared somewhat surly, but as matters early assumed a more serious aspect, he changed his tactics and feigned a more friendly attitude.

Boultinghouse, as best he could, enquired "Whose horse is that?" The Indian, his finger pointing to his own breast said, "Mine." B., "Where you get him?" I., "Me kill white man and take his horse," laughing as he spoke. B., "That was wrong. White man did you no harm, and you killed him and took his horse." I., "Me kill white man in war and take him horse. Me good Indian now. Me love white man." Boultinghouse's friends saw an ominous change coming over the face of their leader, one that they readily recognized as boding no good to the boastful murderer of his innocent boy, and stood prepared for instant action should necessity require it. (The whites at first had taken a stand between the Indians and their guns.) His face had changed, presenting a stern aspect, his lips had turned purple and every appearance indicated a rising storm from within which he was struggling hard to suppress. He again spoke to the savage mildly, but earnestly, telling him that his act was cowardly in killing the helpless boy. The savage made light and with great glee made sport of the lad's actions when wounded, heartily laughing while mimicking

and imitating the dying boy's manner, and his pitiful plea for mercy and life. Then with a brutal effrontery he again said: "War then, me good Injun now." This was too much, and consequences could no longer be taken into account. The outraged father then said: "By the eternal, it's war now!" and as quick as a flash at the sharp crack of his rifle the savage fell dead. The other three men fired almost at the same instant, when two other Indians bit the ground. The remaining Indian broke away, and while climbing a small bank nearby was seized by the calf of his leg by the large dog "Beve," which was with the boy when killed. Such was the savage's strength that with one hand he pushed the dog's head loose from his hold. The whites had taken the Indians' guns which still retained their loads and quickly dispatched the remaining "good Indian."

The fearful tragedy had all occurred within a very few moments at farthest, allowing no time for thought. Under existing laws the whites were guilty of murder, and were liable to extreme penalties. Their conclusion was deliberate and prompt. The transaction must never be known. There must be no witnesses. The three squaws must never be allowed to tell the tale. They also were soon suppressed as a matter of safety, and the seven Indians with their guns and entire outfit were given a grave among the fishes. Boultinghouse took his lost son's mare home and kept her with care as long as she lived. One of the Harrises took care of an Indian filly, claiming to have taken her up as a stray. She lived to an age far beyond the average of her species and was always known as the "stray filly."

The fact that Captain Boultinghouse had recovered his son's filly and that Harris, about the same time, had come into possession of a "stray" caused suspicion, and some commotion, but no effort was made to investigate.

The men engaged in the transaction were all stalwart pioneers, as well as useful citizens, and had been foremost among those who had risked their lives in keeping

back the savage horde from the destruction of the settlements. Who would inform on them?

The incident occurred near the mouth of Kings creek, only a few rods south and within sight of the bridge over which the Southern railway crosses the Little Wabash river, seven miles east of Fairfield.